

# Abstract

## Reaching Low Income Moms with Realistic, Inspiring and Achievable Nutrition Messages

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**Background:** The nutrition assistance programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), reach millions of Americans each year providing a nutritional safety net for low-income families, including millions of households with mothers and children. Many of these households participate in several nutrition programs making them an excellent avenue for reaching low-income families with science-based and motivational messages promoting healthy eating. Research shows that mothers influence household food and feeding environments and are 'trusted sources'. The use of realistic and relevant messages, that build skills and address key mediating factors are important to motivate mothers to take action. There are few nutrition messages developed specifically for low-income audiences and many State and local programs do not have resources to do so. To bridge this gap and support efforts to advance consistent, behavioral-focused nutrition education, FNS lead the development of nutrition messages with related tips, advices, and communication tools to reach moms and kids participating in the federal nutrition assistance programs. In developing the messages, the agency used a collaborative, audience-focused approach. Qualitative research consisted of focus groups with low-income mothers, in six cities. Feedback from program educators (end users) also guided the final products. Ongoing feedback processes provide information on current and planned use of messages, supporting content and guidance. Web reports provide data on visits to the site, download of the guide-over 60,000 copies to date-and use of other information. Educators also share copies of tools they develop that disseminate the messages. Within 6 months of the release of the messages, over 75% of States reported they used or planned to use the messages. Educators across the country have provided examples of ways they utilize the messages in print, audio- visual and web-based communication tools and in counseling and education activities.

**Conclusions:** Collaboration with partners with similar goals and audiences is an effective method of formulating health messages. Partners bring a unique perspective, expertise, understanding of the target audience and of delivery channels that add value to the process and facilitate product dissemination and use.

**Implications for research and/or practice:** The partnership approach and lessons learned from this initiative can be adapted for use for other public health initiatives